

Application Number and Registration Date	MO/2017/1797 (Surrey County Council-Deemed) 05-Oct-2017
Applicant	Mr D Ferns, Dungates Farms Ltd.
Case Officer	Miss Sherelle Munnis
Amendments /amplifications	
Committee Date	4th April 2018
Ward(s)	Brockham, Betchworth & Buckland
Proposal	The development of Buckland Park Lake comprising: 1) a café with associated terrace and disabled parking; 2) outdoor activity centre comprising mobile units; 3) observation pavilion; 4) entry kiosk; 5) two bird hides; 6) an events lawn with steps; 7) children's playground area; 8) car park; 9) water tank/pond; 10) floating pontoon. All for public use in association with the approved water based recreation and proposed land-based outdoor recreation afteruse, of the former silica sand quarry, known as Park Pit. (SCC application - for consultation purposes only.)
Site Description	Park Pit, Reigate Road, Buckland, Surrey

RECOMMENDATION: Approve subject to conditions

Summary

The application site is 40 hectares of open land immediately adjoining the village of Buckland and on the south side of the A25 Dorking to Reigate Road. From about 1960 until 1989 sand was extracted from Park Pit, first by a company under the ownership of the Buckland Estate and subsequently, from 1978, by a large minerals company. From 1989 sand extracted from an adjacent pit north of the A25 was fed by conveyor-belts to a screening plant and pumped in pipelines under the A25 to the processing plant in Park Pit. This arrangement continued until August 2014 when sand extraction ceased. The sand extraction has formed a large void which is filled with water, forming the largest area of standing water in Mole Valley. The site is the subject of a restoration scheme which will

create a recreational lake together with marginal areas that surround it. The current proposal arises out of the desire by the longstanding owners, Buckland Estates Limited, to find a sustainable future for the site that generates income for the estate and provides for future management and maintenance.

During the course of the application the applicant submitted amendments to the County Council removing certain activities, in particular, the use of the site as a wedding venue, which were of particular concern to a number of objectors including Buckland Parish Council. A new list of activities were drawn up most of which are activities which make use of the natural qualities of the site but which also include events such as car boot sales.

The application is for a suite of activities: café with associated terrace and disabled parking; outdoor activity centre including triathlons, wild swimming, sub-aqua, canoeing and rowing; facilities for birdwatchers, picnicking, walking, children's playground; fishing facilities; environmental educational for schools; daytime corporate events entry kiosk; children's playground; car boot sales and antique craft fairs; hire of room for meetings etc. Access to the site for these activities would be by payment of a fee or purchase of a season ticket. The anticipated annual visitors to the site is just under 40,000.

1. Development Plan

- 1.1. Green Belt, SCC Minerals Safeguarding and Search Area, Within 200m of SSSI

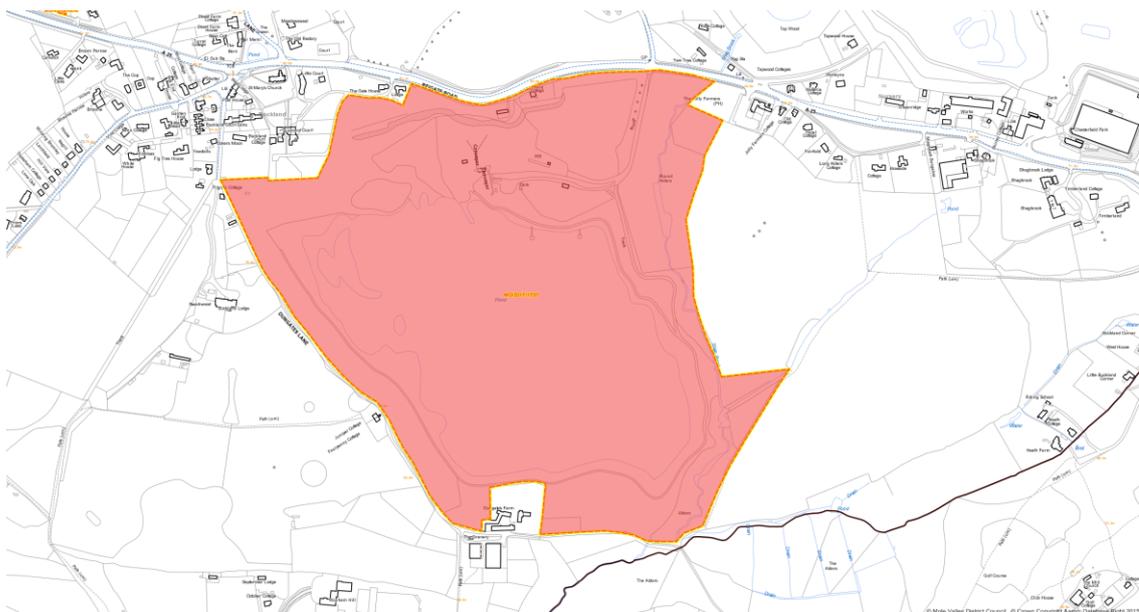
2. Relevant Planning History

MO/1979/798 & MO/1979/0799	Installation of fixed plant, revised working programme involving southern extension of sand working to the south of the previously permitted area and deepening of workings to a depth of 33.5 AOD.	Permitted
MO/1982/1041	Construction of a concrete area for the storage of cullet (broken glass)	Permitted for temporary period
MO/1984/0113	Erection of jackleg office/amenity/toilet unit of 33.44sqm to be used as unit manager's office at Park Pit, Buckland	Permitted
MO/1986/1491	Continued use for a temporary period of 5 years of previously permitted concrete hardstanding with an area of 465sqm for the storage of cullet	Permitted
MO/1989/1573	Erection of combined Ready-Mix concrete and limes and mortar plant and ancillary facilities on a site of about 0.3ha for a temporary period	Refused
MO/1996/1160	Details of restoration of mineral working pursuant to Condition 5 of planning permission reference number MO/92/1224 dated 19th January 1994.	Permitted
MO/1996/1332	Scheme of Management and After Use pursuant to the Section 52 Agreement dated 4th June 1980.	Refused

MO/2008/0338	Continued mineral working, restoration and aftercare without compliance with Conditions 3 of MO/1998/1549	Permitted
MO/2008/0339	Details of scheme management and aftercare pursuant to planning permission MO/98/1549	Permitted
MO/2010/0847	The continued extraction and processing of silica sand and transportation off site of sand, an amended restoration and aftercare scheme for Park Pit with restoration to water-based recreation, woodland and grazing by 31 August 2015	Permitted
MO/2015/0213 SCC	Retention and use of four buildings (nos. 1-4) and power supply ancillary to mineral working in connection with the proposed water-based recreation after use of the site.	Permitted

3. Description of Development

- 3.1. This is an application to Surrey County Council as the minerals authority and this Council is invited to comment as a statutory consultee.
- 3.2. The application site, known as Park Pit, is located on the edge of the Buckland Village Conservation Area, to the south east. Access to the site is from the A25 via a private access. The site forms part of the Buckland Estate and was formerly parkland to the manor house of Buckland Court, now in separate ownership. Buckland Estates Ltd still owns about 450 hectares of land in and around the village of Buckland and has over 40 tenanted properties.



- 3.3. From 1960 until 1989 sand was extracted from Park Pit and subsequently, until the cessation of sand extraction both sides of A25 in August 2015, the site was used for the processing of sand from Tapwood Pit to the north. The application history reflects its use for sand extraction and the arrangements for restoration for recreation purposes. The site has been landscaped to a restoration plan approved by SCC. This restoration plan was first updated in the 1980s and has been updated since then and

singed off in August 2016. From this date the site was formally placed back under management of Dungates Farm Limited (the estate).

- 3.4. The dominant feature of the site in its post excavation phase is the extensive void of the sand pit now filled with water and covering 20 hectares. It is the largest single water body in Mole Valley and covers half of the Park Pit site. Adjacent to the lake is a shallower lagoon. Surrounding these water bodies is a variety of habitats that varies from ancient semi-natural woodland to unimproved grassland. The site has great potential for nature conservation and is a very attractive landscape.
- 3.5. The owners of the site are now seeking permission for a variety of uses that will generate an income for the estate and enable it to maintain the site. A suite of uses is proposed which the applicant contends will attract a cross-section of the public and will maximise the public amenity of the site whilst minimising the impact on the natural environment. Visitors to the site, expected to be in the region of 40,000 per year, will pay a fee for entry. The types of activities that are being proposed include the following: festival events (Easter egg hunts etc.), guided walks, outdoor activities (canoeing, kayaking, swimming, bush craft, archery, woodland low-wire zips and walkways, triathlons), environmental education for schools, room hire for largely local events, craft fairs and car boot sales, children's playground.
- 3.6. These activities would be supported by built development in the form of the following structures:
- 3.7. Café and seating terrace (12m x 12m, height 4.1m). The café would have a maximum capacity of 144 covers (indoors and terrace) and would only be available to those who pay to enter the site. It would normally be open during the day but could be hired for events and for evening events. The building proposed is oak framed, single storey with a pitched clay-tile roof and weather-boarded elevations. This building would be sited in an elevated position above the lagoon and overlooking the lake.
- 3.8. Outdoor Activity Centre (35.5m x 9m, height 3.2m). The outdoor activity centre would consist of toilets and changing facilities, an office, briefing room and storage. The structure will consist of two shipping containers and four mobile buildings located beneath the cliff on the north side of the site. To improve the appearance of these utilitarian structures the proposal is to provide a timber screen with doors to provide access to the modular units behind.
- 3.9. Car parking for 300 cars, including cycle parking covering some 1.08 ha. 150 spaces would be formal spaces where it is assumed that a hard surface would be provided and which would provide for the majority of the demand, with another 150 spaces providing overflow capacity and, presumably using the flat surface recently seeded. Associated with this vehicular access for both private cars and mini-bus drop-off, improvements would be made to the access off A25 in the form of enhanced visibility splays.
- 3.10. Bird Hides (4m x 2m, height 3m). These are simple timber structures with a mono-pitch corrugated roof located on the northern edge of the lake.
- 3.11. Pavilion (18sq m and oval in shape, height 3.2m). This is a timber structure with pitched, shingle roof open on three sides and located on a vantage point close to the café. Its purpose is to provide opportunities for private hire for drinking and dining.
- 3.12. Entry Kiosk (2.7m x 2.4m, height 2.4m). This simple timber structure with mono-pitch roof would be located on the access road 100metres from the main entrance.
- 3.13. Children's Playground (15m x 15m with a boundary fence of 1.2m). This would be located adjacent to the car park and activity centre between the lagoon and the cliff below A25. It will be designed for children aged between 3 and 12 years.

3.14. Fish Tank (existing concrete structure 11m x 5m) which will be converted to an ornamental fish pond. Located close to the café. It will be used to relocate carp, for ecological reasons, taken from the lake.

4. Main Planning Policies

4.1. Government Guidance

NPPF

Section 1 – Building a strong competitive economy

Section 3 – Supporting a prosperous rural economy

Section 11 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Section 9 - Protecting Green Belt Land

4.2. Mole Valley Core Strategy

CS14 – Townscape, Urban Design and the Historic Environment

CS15 – Biodiversity and Geological Conservation

CS16 – Open Space, Sports and Recreational Facilities

4.3. Mole Valley Local Plan

ENV4 – Landscape Character

ENV22 – General Development Control Criteria

ENV13 – Features of Local Importance for Nature Conservation

ENV14 – Enhancement, Management and Creation of Nature Conservation Features

ENV15 – Species Protection

REC13 - Water-Based Recreation

REC17 – Noisy Sports, War Games and Similar Activities

REC19 – Visitor Related Development

4.4. Other Documents

SCC Minerals Core Strategy

5. Main Planning Issues

5.1. The main planning issues for consideration are:

- Consideration of uses
- Landscape and Ecology
- Traffic and Access

Consideration of uses

5.2. Park Pit lies with the Green Belt. Paragraph 89 of the NPPF states that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be regarded as inappropriate. Exceptions to this are listed as follows:

- buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation
- and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;

- the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
 - limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan; or
 - limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.
- 5.3. One of the exceptions is the provision of facilities for outdoor sport and recreation as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. The purpose of the proposed buildings is for outdoor sport and recreation with two possible exceptions. One is the pavilion where the purpose seems primarily to be for entertaining. There are also landscape reasons for seeking the omission of this structure from the range of buildings proposed. The other building is the café. The applicant sees this building as central to the range of facilities to be offered, providing refreshments and toilets (although there are also toilets associated with the outdoor centre). They also see it as a building that can be hired for meetings or small events. For those using the site informally however, a separate set of toilet facilities and refreshment facilities might not be considered unreasonable and the existence of the café would help with security and surveillance. It is considered, therefore, that with the exception of the pavilion, the buildings proposed would accord with Green Belt policy.
- 5.4. Details of the buildings and the activities they support are detailed in section 3 above. The majority of these activities could be considered to accord with policy REC13 in so far that they are quiet and low key and utilise the natural quality of the site. Notwithstanding this comment, the proposed use of the site for triathlon events cannot be contained within the site and the suitability of surrounding roads and open spaces to accommodate them has not been sufficiently established. In addition, the proposal to accommodate craft fairs and car boot sales is not considered to accord with Local Plan policy because there are more sustainable locations for these types of activities which are not dependent on a rural site where there are nature conservation interests and there would be conflict with others seeking quiet enjoyment of the landscape.
- 5.5. The inclusion of triathlons, although not specifically requiring planning permission, is not thought to be well-considered. This type of activity could not be contained within the site and could well spill over onto adjacent sites, including the Reigate Heath SSSI. It is not clear that surrounding road would be suitable for the cycling element of triathlons. For these reasons the applicant should be advised to remove this type of event from the list of activities and the County Council may wish to control this through the removal of permitted development rights. In general terms, if the application is permitted by the County Council, conditions would be needed to control the period of use of the facilities and control noise, including amplified music.

Landscape and Ecology

- 5.6. The site contains a number of habitats with considerable potential for supporting wildlife. A number of the objectors who have written separately in response to the County Council consultation exercise have commented on the lack of supporting ecological information which makes it difficult to assess the impacts of the development on species and habitats. The applicant argues that the small scale of the proposals would be costly and does not justify more extensive survey and analysis. A number of objectors to the project have disagreed with this position and there is a strong case of a more comprehensive understanding of the ecological value and potential of what could be an important site for nature conservation. If the local

authorities are to obtain ecological gains as suggested in the NPPF, it is important to base decisions on a good understanding of the current ecological status of the site. This is especially the case because the previous use resulted in an under-recording. Ideally this information should be available prior to determination of the application; however, if the County Council is minded to permit the application then at the very least a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) should be prepared prior to the commencement of the activities proposed.

- 5.7. Park Pit is a very attractive location. The base of the sand pit accommodating the lake and lagoon is largely hidden from public views because of the depth of the pit and the surrounding vegetation. There are no landscape designations covering the site, probably because of the history of mineral workings here, but immediately to the north, south and east are AONB or AGLV designations. Natural England has agreed to review the boundaries of the AGLV and this is one area that may well be looked at quite closely.
- 5.8. The Surrey Landscape Character Assessment (SLA) places Park Pit in the Greensand Valley landscape type whose characteristics include important views, varied woodland and open fields. Reference is also made to the open water areas associated with old mineral workings. In terms of sensitivities, the SLA mentions the growth of car-based tourism and visitor pressures on villages, particularly along the A25 such as at Shere, Buckland and Bletchingly. The strategy recommended for this landscape type is to conserve the rural character of the open pastoral valley sides, the historic village cores and the varied water bodies. Opportunities are identified to manage and restore traditional landscape features such as trees and hedgerow and enhance or link areas of high biodiversity value and positive landscape attributes where there are opportunities through landscape restoration and land management. The Council's own landscape SPD supports these conclusions.
- 5.9. The proposals are contained and structures focussed on the area of the lagoon at the northern end of the site closest to the access from A25. Although the landscape assessment carried out by the applicant has certain limitations, it is not considered that there would be an adverse impact on the village of Buckland. Of the properties on the edge of the site, views would be limited or distant. The proposed buildings can perhaps be described as utilitarian but in the case of the café external materials are likely to help integrate the building into its surroundings and similarly with the timber cladding fronting the outdoor activity centre. The applicant has indicated that, if the enterprise is successful, thought would be given to upgrading the facilities in the future. The pavilion is an 'off the peg' building in an elevated position. Its design would be more in keeping with a domestic garden and it does not appear essential to support the activities on the site. It is recommended that this element be deleted from the proposals. The positioning of the bird hides may benefit from a condition as there is some concern that they are not likely to function well in their current proposed locations.
- 5.10. A strong landscape condition will be needed to ensure that planting is appropriate to the rural surroundings and to help assimilate the new buildings into their surroundings. The landscape proposals as submitted require further work, including the car park area and surfacing treatments and the children's playground.
- 5.11. The application lacks a clear vision for the restoration of the landscape. The suggestion to the County Council is that a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan is required with any development permitted on this site. This would take account of any current restoration conditions and ensure that there are landscape gains and visitor pressures controlled. There are blocks of ancient semi-natural woodland on the east side of the site that would benefit from management and should be included in an overall management plan.

Traffic and Access

- 5.12. The applicant proposes improvements to the existing access from the A25. The views of the County Council are not known at the time of writing this report.

Conclusion

- 5.13. Members are asked to support a recommendation that supports the principle of suitable outdoor recreation uses at Park Pit, Buckland but objects to the current application because of the conflict with NPPF and local plan policies as outlined in this report.

6. Recommendation

That Surrey County Council be informed that Mole Valley District Council supports the principle of recreation uses at Park Pit, Buckland but would raise **OBJECTION** to the current application on the grounds that it does not accord the NPPF and local plan policies, in particular NPPF para 89 and para 109, Local Plan policies ENV14, ENV15, REC13, REC19 and Core Strategy policy CS16. These policies require that activities associated with restored areas of exhausted mineral workings be low key and quiet and where the natural environment and nature conservation interests are safeguarded and enhanced. Currently the Council considers that there is an absence of detailed ecological information upon which to base a decision and ecological gains are not clear. Additionally, that the pavilion building is inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It is also considered that triathlons should be removed as they cannot be contained within the site and it is not clear that surrounding sites and roads are suitable for them.

However, if the County Council is minded to approve the application the following matters should be dealt with by means of appropriate conditions:

- Car boot fairs and craft fairs should be removed from the list of activities as they do not accord with the aims set out by the applicant's design and access statement of maximising public amenity whilst minimising the impact on the natural environment, and there are more sustainable locations for these activities. Consideration should be given to removing permitted development rights for these types of activities.
- The preparation of a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) based on a more complete knowledge of the species and habitats and drawing together the management of public access with existing and outstanding measures, agreed with the County Council for the restoration of the site, and the Hanson Biodiversity Action Plan. The LEMP should clearly indicate ecological gains in line with NPPF paragraph 20;